

Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
ACDA-12 MCT-01 TRSE-00 OMB-01 IO-13 /095 R

DRAFTED BY ARA/USOAS:IGTRAGEN
APPROVED BY ARA/USOAS:IGTRAGEN
ARA/CEN:WMATHEWS
-----043788 020709Z /17

R 012229Z JUN 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 139232

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OAS, PBOR, ES, HO

SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR/HONDURAS MILITARY OBSERVERS

1. SUMMARY: COLONEL LUIS HORACIO AGUDELO RIOS OF COLOMBIA, CHIEF OF THE OAS MILITARY OBSERVERS ON THE EL SALVADOR/HONDURAS BORDER REPORTED TO THE 13TH MFM ON MAY 30 THAT: 1) THERE ARE FEW BORDER INCIDENTS IN THE TERRITORY IN DISPUTE; 2) THAT COOPERATION BETWEEN THE SALVADORAN AND HONDURAS GOVERNMENTS, ESPECIALLY AT ALL LEVELS IN THE MILITARY CHAIN OF COMMAND, IS EXTREMELY GOOD; 3) THAT THERE IS CAUSE FOR CONCERN ABOUT THE PHYSICAL SAFETY OF THE OAS OBSERVERS BECAUSE OF THE INCREASE IN URBAN AND RURAL VIOLENCE IN EL SALVADOR WHICH HE SEES SPILLING OVER INTO THE BORDER AREAS OF BOTH COUNTRIES; 4) THAT THE ASSIGNMENT TIME OF OBSERVERS NEEDS TO BE CLARIFIED; AND 5) THAT DIFFERENCES IN SUPPORT
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PROVIDED BY THE TWO GOVERNMENTS IS CREATING DIFFICULTIES FOR THE OBSERVERS. END SUMMARY.

2. COLONEL AGUDELO INDICATED THAT OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS THE MILITARY OF BOTH COUNTRIES HAVE BEEN DEALING EASILY WITH EACH OTHER AND RESOLVING BORDER PROBLEMS WITH A MINIMUM OF DIFFICULTIES. HE EXPRESSED CONCERN, HOWEVER,

THAT SOME OF THIS GOOD FEELING HAS BEEN DISSIPATED IN

RECENT WEEKS SINCE THE APPOINTMENT OF THE NEW SALVADORAN FOREIGN MINISTER AND HIS RETURN FROM WHAT THE COLONEL CALLED "THE UNSUCCESSFUL MEDIATION SESSION IN LIMA." AGUDELO ILLUSTRATED THIS GOOD FEELING BY REPORTING ON RAPID ARRANGEMENTS TO REPATRIATE A SALVADORAN PLANE AND ITS OCCUPANTS WHICH WAS FORCED DOWN IN HONDURAS: IT TOOK ONLY A FEW HOURS TO RETURN THE PASSENGERS TO SALVADOR AND ONLY A FEW DAYS FOR THE RETURN OF THE PLANE; AND NONE OF THE MONEY OR PERSONAL EFFECTS ABOARD THE PLANE WAS STOLEN. HE REPORTED THAT MILITARY UNITS OF BOTH GOVERNMENTS HAVE BEEN COOPERATING IN DEALING WITH BORDER PROBLEMS. HE ATTRIBUTED THIS IMPROVED ENVIRONMENT TO THE PRESENCE OF THE OAS OBSERVERS AND TO THEIR ROLE AS INTERMEDIARIES IN BRINGING OFFICERS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES TOGETHER.

3. COLONEL AGUDELO STRESSED HIS CONCERN ABOUT THE DETERIORATING PROBLEM OF SUBVERSION IN EL SALVADOR. HE REPORTED THAT THERE ARE UNIFORMED GUERRILLAS IN RURAL AREAS NOW, THAT THERE IS A GROWING DANGER TO THE PERSONAL SAFETY OF OAS OBSERVERS AND THAT HE HAS RESTRICTED MOVEMENTS BY OBSERVERS TO MINIMIZE THIS THREAT. HE WAS CAREFUL NOT TO BE ALARMIST BUT CLEARLY PUT THE MFN ON NOTICE. HE THEN WENT ON TO REPORT THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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POLICE AND MILITARY UNITS OF BOTH COUNTRIES ARE WORKING TOGETHER IN BORDER AREAS TO IDENTIFY AND PURSUE TERRORISTS, ESPECIALLY IN THE SABANETA REGION.

4. COLONEL AGUDELO NEXT RAISED THE QUESTION OF HOW LONG THE OBSERVERS ARE TO BE ASSIGNED TO THE SALVADOR-HONDURAS BORDER AREAS. WHEN THE CURRENT AGREEMENT ENDS ON JULY 15, 1978, HE INDICATED THE DESIRABILITY OF PINNING THE TWO GOVERNMENTS DOWN MORE PRECISELY TO THE LENGTH OF EACH OBSERVER'S TOUR. HE POINTED OUT THAT THE CURRENT 90-DAY ASSIGNMENT IS TOO SHORT TO DO MORE THAN ORIENT AN OBSERVER AND THEN GET READY FOR HIS REPLACEMENT. AGUDELO WOULD LIKE TO KEEP HIS TRAINED STAFF FOR AT LEAST 180 DAYS AND FEELS THAT THE TWO GOVERNMENTS SHOULD CONSIDER CAREFULLY THE TIME FRAME FOR WHICH OBSERVERS ARE NEEDED. THE ECUADORAN AMBASSADOR TO THE OAS ASKED THE COLONEL IF, WITH FEW BORDER INCIDENTS, THERE IS A NEED FOR OAS OBSERVERS AFTER JULY 15.

5. COLONEL AGUDELO POINTED OUT THAT OAS OBSERVERS IN EL SALVADOR RECEIVE LODGING, FOOD AND OTHER SUPPORT WHICH

IS NOT PROVIDED BY THE HONDURAN GOVERNMENT. HE REPORTED THAT HE HAS TALKED TO PRESIDENT MELGAR OF HONDURAS, ABOUT HIS COUNTRY'S PROVIDING THE SAME SUPPORT FOR OBSERVERS AS EL SALVADOR. WHILE HE DID NOT SPECIFICALLY ASK FOR MFM INTERVENTION WITH THE HONDURAN GOVERNMENT, HE IMPLIED THAT DISCREET INDICATIONS BY THE MFM TO THE HONDURAN GOVERNMENT OF THE PROBLEM MIGHT BE HELPFUL.

6. MFM IS PLANNING A FOLLOW-UP MEETING IN WEEK OF JUNE 5 TO CONSIDER QUESTIONS RAISED BY COLONEL AGUDELO. WOULD APPRECIATE EMBASSY SAN SALVADOR AND EMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA VIEWS ON: A) BORDER CONDITIONS; B) SERIOUSNESS OF TERRORIST THREAT TO OBSERVERS IN BORDER AREAS AS WELL AS THE CAPITALS; C) NEED FOR CONTINUING OBSERVERS BEYOND JULY 15
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AND D) IF NEEDED BEYOND JULY 15, WHAT LENGTH OF EXTENSION SHOULD BE SOUGHT: THREE OR SIX MONTHS?

7. FOR EMBASSY SAN SALVADOR: WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR ASSESSMENT OF COLONEL AGUDELO'S IMPRESSION THAT SALVADORAN DISPOSITION TO COOPERATE WITH HONDURAN COLLEAGUES HAS COOLED SINCE RODRIGUEZ PORTO BECAME FOREIGN MINISTER.

8. FOR EMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA: WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR ASSESSMENT OF MOST APPROPRIATE APPROACH TO GOH ON ARRANGING EQUAL TREATMENT FOR OAS OBSERVERS BY HONDURAN GOVERNMENT. VANCE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TRUCE OBSERVERS, BORDER INCIDENTS, INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE139232
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: IGTRAGEN
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780230-0915
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197806105/aaaadmvl.tel
Line Count: 148
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 48ba417d-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2154925
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: EL SALVADOR/HONDURAS MILITARY OBSERVERS
TAGS: PBOR, MARR, ES, HO, OAS
To: SAN SALVADOR TEGUCIGALPA
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/48ba417d-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014